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## Disruptions: A TV That Can Read Me

By **NICK BILTON**

Koji Sasahara/Associated Press Rather than fumbling with traditional remote controls and program guides of cable boxes, Xbox Live users will be able to search for shows using voice commands and hand gestures, if they also have the popular Kinect peripheral for the Xbox.

Television, and, for that matter, a whole lot of other devices, including cellphones and cars, are about to get more perceptive.

On Tuesday, millions of Microsoft Xbox users will be able to download an update to their game console that will enable them to talk to their televisions. “Xbox, play the Harry Potter movie,” will whisk them into the world of wizards. “Xbox, change the channel to ESPN,” will put them on the 50-yard line.

As I [wrote last month](#) on the Bits blog, Apple is planning to adapt its Siri voice command software, which has made the iPhone 4S a hit, to an Apple-branded TV. Microsoft beat it to the punch, but by the time Apple TVs show up, probably in 2013, both Siri and Microsoft’s voice commands will be far more sophisticated.

Meanwhile, Siri is expected to advise and console the owners of the next version of the Apple iPad, and it will most likely figure in future updates to the iPod too.

Before you know it, you’ll be talking to all of your gadgets, and typing on them much less than you do today.

In the car, voice commands make complete sense. In the kitchen, too, where your hands are otherwise occupied or just plain messy. In the living room, we could finally see the end to annoying remote controls that usually have more buttons than a NASA space shuttle control room.

Yet talking to your television is just one way you’ll interact with devices. For example, the Xbox allows people to wave at their television, flipping through video content by flailing their hands in the air. The computer’s ability to read our gestures will become more subtle.

“There are methods to talk to computers that are even simpler than things like voice,” Yael Maguire, a visiting scientist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University, explained in an interview by phone. “Everything we do, every

movement of our body, our hands, our eyes can all become digital and will convey and fill in little gaps of information.”

We’re not talking about computer chips implanted in our heads — although this will be entirely feasible for some people. Instead, you will talk to your computer, smartphone and television much as you communicate with a puppy.

Take Pixel, my dog. When I tell her to go to her bed, I say those words. But my eyes usually dart to her bed and she picks up that cue. Dogs are very good at picking up human’s nonverbal cues. Your computers will soon do the same thing.

If I meet someone, my smartphone should know if we are meeting for the first time by close observation. If I introduce myself and shake hands, our phones should then automatically exchange information. No need for antiquated business cards.

If my TV knows there is someone else in the room with me, it could suggest content to watch, either by recognizing me visually, or by talking directly to my iPhone to learn by checking the person’s smartphone presume? MM the shows we both like on Facebook or Twitter. The movie I’m watching will automatically pause when I need to go to the bathroom. The TV will just turn on and off when I sit down or stand up.

As Mr. Maguire says, our devices could follow any number of cues to understand what we’re doing. “We shouldn’t have to tell our phones that we’re going for a run and want to track our distance; it should just know by the fact that we start running,” he said.

The television, which has changed only aesthetically since its invention, is about to be completely disrupted by these new interfaces. In the process, it’s about to become a whole lot smarter, maybe even as smart as Pixel.